

Test-optional? A Review of Admission Criteria and Predictors of Success on the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam

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Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to investigate if a significant correlation exists between student test scores obtained on the SAT examination, admission GPA and scores obtained on the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination (PANCE) for recent Physician Assistant program graduates.

Methods

SAT scores were obtained from historical student reports kept in student files. PANCE scores were obtained from the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) for 5 cohorts of first-time college students (traditional freshman) and PANCE takers for the years 2015-2019. Admission GPAs were obtained from historical student records for 4 cohorts (2016-2019). A Pearson's correlation statistic was used to analyze the data using Microsoft Excel with statistical significance set at $p < .05$.

Results

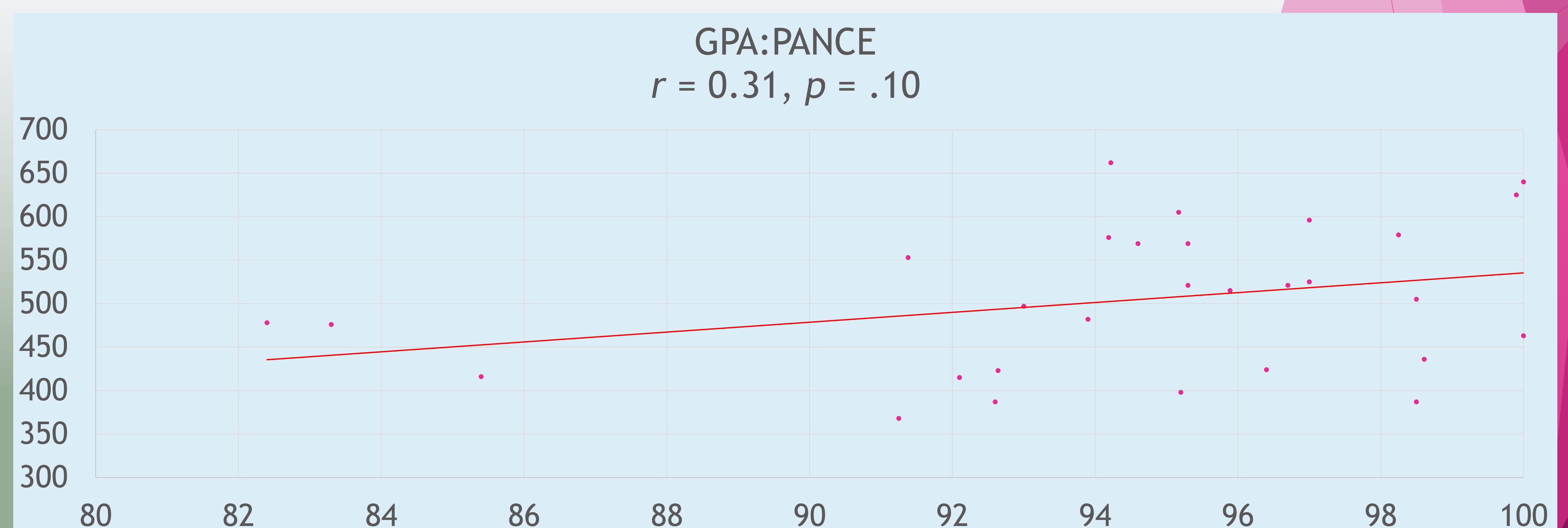
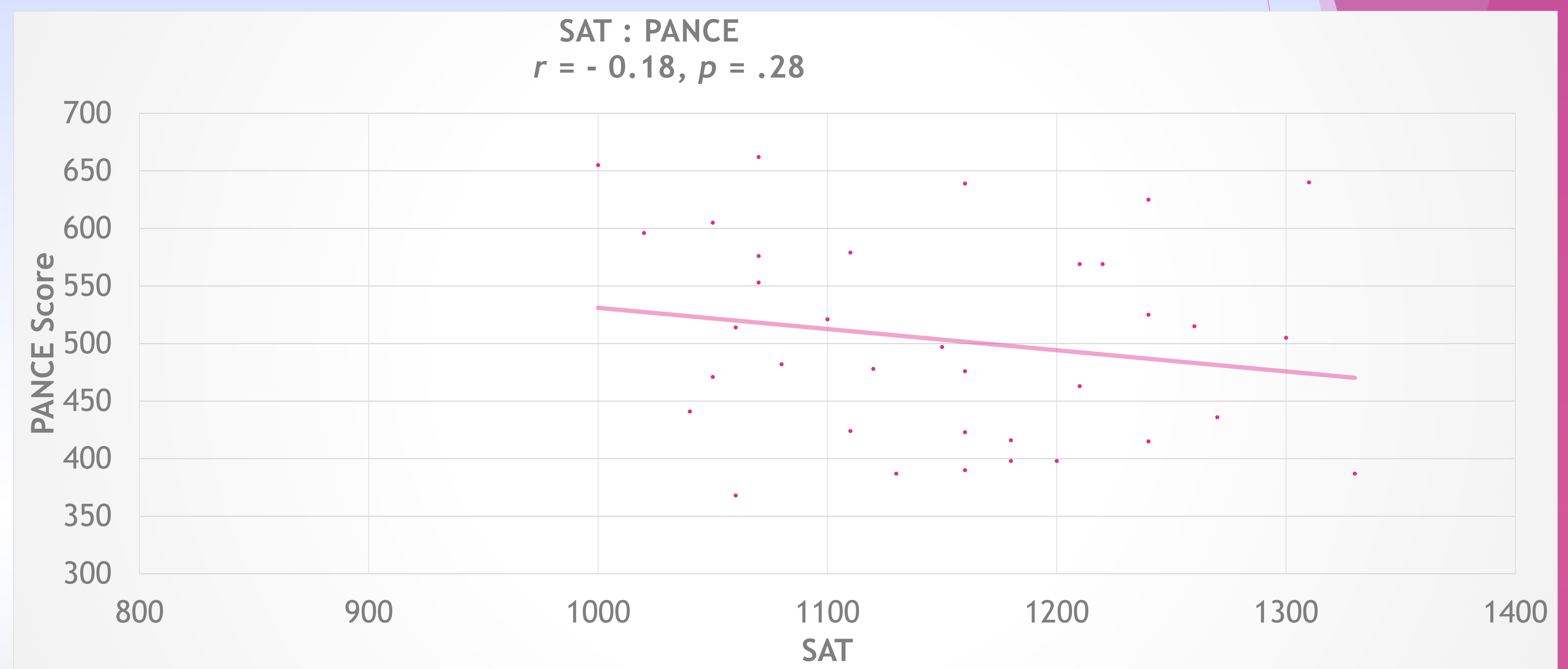
The sample included 36 recent Physician Assistant program graduates. 67% were female, with a mean SAT score of 1151 (reading and math) and a mean PANCE score of 503. Mean admission GPA was 94.44 ($n = 29$). All 36 students passed the PANCE on first attempt. Data revealed a very small (weak) negative correlation ($r = -.18$) between SAT and PANCE, however it was not statistically significant ($p = .28$). There was also a moderate positive correlation ($r = .31$) between admission GPA and PANCE, however, this was not statistically significant ($p = .10$).

Conclusions:

The results revealed two interesting findings. First, the higher the admission GPA the higher the PANCE score. This is not surprising and has been supported by other published studies. However, our results were not statistically significant. More interesting however, is that the results showed an inverse relationship existed between SAT score and results on the PANCE; the lower the SAT score the higher the PANCE score and the higher the SAT score the lower the PANCE score. Though not statically significant, it warrants further study and may support further removal of standardized test scores from admission criteria at institutions and PA programs.

INTRODUCTION:

- According to the National Center for Fair and Open Testing, over 1800 accredited colleges and universities are ACT/SAT test optional for Fall 2022 admitting class¹.
- D'Youville has been test-optional for admission to some programs, but for the Fall of 2021 class, it transitioned to a fully test-optional institution.
- As a PA program committed to upholding the ARC-PA accreditation process, we set out to investigate if a significant correlation exists between student test scores obtained on the SAT examination, admission GPA and scores obtained on the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination (PANCE) for recent Physician Assistant program graduates.



Limitations:

- Single site study; potential maturation effect

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References:

1. Fairtest, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing. Retrieved April 19, 2022: <https://www.fairtest.org/university/optional>